

STATUSES, ROLES, AND THE SENSE OF MATTERING

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ABSTRACT: *Individuals with a sense of mattering perceive they are acknowledged and relevant in the lives of other people. Using data from a representative sample of adults age eighteen to fifty-five from Toronto, Canada, who are employed in the paid labor force, we examine the effects of statuses, roles, and occupational conditions on mattering. Being female, having children, and holding jobs with more autonomy, complexity, fulfillment, and supervision duties enriches the conviction of mattering. Relationship and parental strains are related negatively to mattering, which conceals the positive effects of spousal-partner and parental roles. Results show gender-contingent effects: women in our sample derive greater benefits for mattering from education, but they also are affected more negatively by work-to-home conflict. Conversely, in our findings, men gain more from having children and being involved in a relationship, but they are also affected more negatively by relationship strains. Other results show that the positive relationship of age with job autonomy and complexity suppresses its negative association with mattering. Collectively, these results add to knowledge about the social-structural influences on the self-concept.*

What features of an individual's social location affect his or her sense of mattering to other people? The study of social affiliation, cohesion, and integration has a long history in sociology (Blau [1964] 1998; Durkheim 1951; Simmel 1955). The concept of mattering flows through those processes. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981:165) define mattering as "the feeling that others depend upon us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension." The general construct subsumes four dimensions: attention, importance, dependence, and ego-extension. Individuals with a strong sense of mattering perceive that their actions are acknowledged and relevant in the lives of other people. Similarly, the "dependence" dimension pertains to the web of responsibilities and

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obligations that connect individuals. Moreover, the dependence on emotional and instrumental transactions, and the concern about successes and failures, binds individuals together.

The exchanges that harvest a sense of mattering reflect behavioral and affective dynamics that sustain the basic forms of social organization in work and family life. Although some studies document mattering's positive associations with mental health and self-esteem (Pearlin and LeBlanc 2001; Rosenberg and McCullough 1981; Whiting 1982), little is known about the linkages between work and family roles and perceptions of mattering. Thus, using data from a representative sample of adults age eighteen to fifty-five who reside in Toronto, Canada, and are involved in the paid labor force, we ask, what is the distribution of mattering across social statuses, family, and work conditions? In the second part of the article, we draw on ideas from role conflict theory to examine if discord within and between roles affects mattering. In the third section, we apply ideas from gender role theory to evaluate sex-contingent effects among relationships between personal and social characteristics and mattering.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Structure and Mattering

We draw on the premise that the form and quality of roles reflect dimensions of social integration and thus contribute to the sense of mattering. Intimate human ties exemplify primary group structures (Simmel 1955). Within primary groups, the arrangement of tasks, obligations, and expectations fosters integrative processes that often insulate individuals from the destructive feelings of alienation (Cooley 1909; Homans 1951). In addition, work-related structures can expose individuals to opportunities for success and failure, which contain messages about their relevance to others (Gecas and Seff 1989; House 1981). The exchange of labor, ideas, and favors within roles has an impact on the self-concept and the relationship between the self and others (Rosenberg 1979). Over time, the strength of bonds solidifies group cohesion and reciprocal transactions (Blau [1964] 1998; Homans 1961). Such experiences cultivate the interpersonal investment in and commitment to significant others (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Myers 2000).

Theories of human development describe the link between identities and the perception that one is relevant in the world (Erikson 1980). Interpersonal relationships within salient role identities cultivate feelings of purpose and meaning (Thoits 1992). In adulthood, family and work identities are central facets of the human experience. As people engage in work and family roles over the life course, they develop a sense of their own place and worth within the structural arrangements of daily life (Pearlin 1983). For example, married people typically have established patterns of responsibilities and commitments that create a sense of being important in the lives of a significant other—their spouse. Those involved in a steady, intimate relationship may also experience the attention and acknowledgment from their partner that fosters a sense of mattering. Similarly, parents may have children who depend on them to provide basic needs such as food,

shelter, and protection. Moreover, parenthood frequently involves responsibilities related to discipline, instruction, and supervision. Children pay attention to a figure that can render punishment for misdeeds or furnish rewards for virtuous conduct. Collectively, therefore, we contend that relationship and parental roles elevate “the interpersonal attitude of inferred significance” (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981:179).

Social statuses and occupational experiences also provide opportunities for relationships that enhance mattering. For example, higher education often produces work roles with substantial commitments and duties (Reynolds and Ross 1998). Moreover, job qualities such as autonomy and complexity entail greater self-directedness and power (Kohn and Schooler 1973, 1982). Self-direction involves “the use of initiative, thought, and independent judgment at work” (Kohn and Slomczynski 1990:110). It is well established that social class indicators affect personal variables indirectly through their effect on work conditions (Kohn and Schooler 1982; Pearlin and Kohn 1966). Individuals of higher social status may occupy positions that require the management and supervision of vital operations. Such decision-making latitude ultimately can influence the direction and effectiveness of the organization. By extension, individuals in such role arrangements likely feel a sense of causal importance. Indeed, some research shows that work conditions affect attitudes, values, and perceptions of the self (Kohn 1976; Rosenberg 1957). In particular, self-directedness within the occupational sphere is associated positively with personal mastery (Kohn 1977; Mirowsky and Ross 1989) and self-esteem (Kohn and Schooler 1973; Rosenberg 1979). However, we are unaware of any studies that document the relationship between work conditions and the sense of mattering. Nor could we locate any explicit findings about the links among education, work conditions, and mattering. Based on existing empirical and theoretical evidence, we contend that job autonomy, complexity (i.e., low routinization), fulfillment, and supervision responsibility increase the sense of mattering. Moreover, we expect that education is associated positively with mattering and that most of that effect occurs indirectly through work qualities.

Role Conflict and Mattering

Social embeddedness, as reflected in role incumbency and multiple role commitments, can have positive and negative effects on the self-concept. On the one hand, work and family roles provide social rewards; on the other, role commitments can trigger excessive demands and interpersonal discord. We explore both possibilities. For example, a spouse or romantic partner can provide love and support and sustain a sense of mattering. However, such intimate relationships also contain the greatest propensity for the most passionate disunity (Coser 1956; Simmel 1955)—conflict that may suppress the beneficial effects of close, cherished bonds. In addition, children can exert enduring demands on parents (Pearlin and Turner 1987). Children traverse the terrain of their own role evolution within peer groups and school life as their identity develops. Along that journey, parents often have to deal with the emotional peaks and valleys and uncooperative behavior of their children. The family, as a central agent of socialization and support, often

must absorb and adapt to the complications that result. While most parents value and love their children, the stressors of parenthood may interfere with their own role functioning.

The antagonism between work and family spheres may reflect interrole conflict that potentially harms the self. Work-family spillover involves the perception that aspects of one domain interfere with or disrupt the other (Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1987). The stress process model identifies interrole conflict as a significant source of stress (Pearlin 1983, 1989). Tension between work and family roles can diminish physical and mental health (Barnett and Marshall 1991) and undermine role functioning (Barnett 1994). Moreover, we suspect that interference between domains may erode the attention, importance, and dependence that significant others feel and diminish one's own sense of mattering.

An alternative argument views antagonism between roles as an indication of multiple role *commitments*, obligations, and responsibilities—factors that can enhance mattering. When elements of work and family collide, a constellation of demands pulls the individual in opposing directions. While potentially stressful, those conflicting forces may also convey the message that others depend on the individual; that is, the absence or withdrawal of the individual from the role would disturb the functioning of the system. Similarly, Rosenberg and McCullough (1981:180) contend that most people “assume burdens happily and accept restraints freely if it gives them a feeling of significance, a feeling that they matter to others.” Thus, work-family conflict may represent stress while simultaneously instilling a sense of relevance in the lives of others.

Gender-Contingent Effects

The social-structural determinants of mattering may vary for women and men. For example, studies document that women realize greater *health* benefits from higher education than do men (Reynolds and Ross 1998). Applying those ideas to the self-concept, we contend that the positive effect of education on mattering is stronger among women. Gender differences in the social and cultural organization of work and family life shape the self-concept (Rosenfield 1999). Through childhood socialization and adulthood practices, women and men develop different—often unequal—trajectories within work and family. Traditional gender differences in the affiliation with public (work) and private (family) domains may moderate the impact of marital and parental role occupancy on the sense of mattering. Socialization and role incumbencies shape the acquisition and enactment of goals. Traditionally, women's roles revolved around family-related responsibilities. Conversely, conventional social norms tended to reward men for career aspirations and achievements. Those arguments imply that men and women realize social rewards, and subsequent self-rewards, within different spheres. By extension, women in our sample may tend to experience mattering within marital and parental roles and men may derive greater benefits from work roles.

Does the relationship between work-family conflict and mattering differ for women and men? Gender role theory suggests that women and men experience different tasks, expectancies, and responsibilities in work and family roles, even

when they are in similar occupations (Barnett 1994). Both women and men grapple with the competing demands between work and family (Menaghan 1994). However, women continue to endure the challenges of interrole conflict, notably due to the structural organization of household management (Hochschild 1989, 1997). Conventional norms about the division of labor imply that the employee role is simply a "supplement" to women's more anchored position in the home (Barnett and Baruch 1987). Moreover, when work and home spheres collide women tend to give priority to the home (Miller et al. 1979). Although women's central role is often linked to family, even while involved in the workforce, men's core role often tends to be associated with paid employment. Thus conflict between home and work may pose a greater threat to the fulfillment of men's identity as "good provider" (Gutek, Searle, and Klepa 1991). Fusing traditional views about gender norms and interrole conflict as a stressor yields the prediction that women may tend to experience work-to-home conflict more acutely than do men; that is, work-to-home conflict erodes women's sense of mattering. Alternatively, home-to-work conflict may undermine employed men's sense of feeling relevant, consequential, and significant.

DATA AND METHODS

Sample

The data derive from face-to-face interviews of 1,393 adult residents of metropolitan Toronto (Turner and Lloyd 1995). The sampling process provided a representative sample of addresses from each enumeration area of the city in proportion to the 1986 population census. Given that the sample was of household units, the Kish ([1965] 1995) procedure was used to assure the random selection of persons within each unit. The Kish method oversamples single-person households, so analyses here are weighted to correct this factor. Eligible respondents included people aged eighteen to fifty-five living in their principal residence, fluent in English, and physically and mentally capable of responding to the questionnaire. The success rate was 77 percent, producing the 1,393 in the full sample. Interviews of those respondents were conducted over a one-year period from 1990 to 1991. The ethnic makeup of the sample is diverse, with twenty-five distinct ethnic groups accounting for at least one-half of one percent of the study population, making analyses of racial-ethnic differences unfeasible. For our analyses, we selected 994 respondents who reported that they were employed at the time of the interview ("Are you working *now* for pay?"). Other questions ask about full- or part-time work and the number of weekly work hours (on average). Weekly work hours could influence relationships in our analyses, so we adjust for it in all of our models. Finally, we dropped cases with missing values on items that measure our dependent variable, the mattering items, leaving a final sample of 987 for analysis in our study.

Measures

Dependent variable. Five items ask respondents the following questions: (1) "How important do you feel you are to other people?" [.80]; (2) "How much do you feel

other people pay attention to you?" [.75]; (3) "How much do you feel others would miss you if you went away?" [.79]; (4) "How interested are people generally in what you have to say?" [.71]; and (5) "How much do other people depend on you?" [.63]. The response choices include "a lot" (1), "somewhat" (2), "a little" (3), and "not at all" (4). A confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the five items. The factor loadings are shown in brackets next to each item. We reversed the codes and averaged the items; higher scores indicate a greater sense of mattering. The alpha reliability coefficient is .78.

Sociodemographic variables. Age is measured in years. Married status is coded 1 if the respondent is married, 0 for all others. Parenthood status is coded 1 if respondents have children and 0 if not. Education measures years of educational attainment. For respondents who are not married, an item asks if the respondent is "currently involved in a steady, romantic relationship" (1) or not (0). Also, one item assesses personal income with categories that range from (0) "no income" to (15) "\$135,000 and above." Response choices (0) through (5) contain \$5,000 intervals; choices (6) through (15) have \$10,000 intervals.

Occupational conditions. An item about weekly work hours asks respondents, "How many hours do you work on your main job in an average week?" A supervision item asks, "Do you supervise anybody as part of your job?" Response choices are "no" (0) and "yes" (1). Job autonomy and routinization items are similar to those used by Kohn and Schooler (1969, 1973, 1982) in their original studies of work, personality, and psychological functioning. The autonomy items ask respondents: (1) "Do you make decisions on your own?" (2) "Do you control the speed at which you work?" (3) "Does your supervisor decide what you do and how you do it?" (4) "Do you have a lot of freedom to decide how to do your work?" Response choices include "never" (1), "once in a while" (2), "much of the time" (3), and "almost always" (4). We summed the items; higher scores indicate greater job autonomy. Reliability is .69. Similarly, regarding job routinization, respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following two items: (1) "Most of the time my job seems to drag for me" and (2) "I do the same thing over and over again." Response choices are "strongly disagree" (1), "somewhat disagree" (2), "somewhat agree" (3), and "strongly agree" (4). We summed the items to create the index; higher scores indicate greater job routinization. Job fulfillment items ask respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree that (1) "some of the most important things that happen to me involve my job" and (2) "my work is a source of great satisfaction for me." Response choices range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (4). We summed the items; higher scores reflect greater job fulfillment. The two items correlate .38.

Role conflict. Relationship role strain items ask respondents the extent to which they are currently experiencing the following: (1) "You have a lot of conflict with your partner"; (2) "Your relationship restricts your freedom"; (3) "Your partner doesn't understand you"; (4) "Your partner expects too much of you"; (5) "Your partner doesn't show enough affection"; (6) "Your partner is not committed enough to your relationship"; (7) "Your sexual needs are not fulfilled by this relationship." Response choices include "not true" (0), "somewhat true" (1), and "very true" (2). We summed the items such that higher scores indicate greater

relationship conflict. Reliability is .84. The “not married or partnered” have a “0” on the relationship role strain index.

Parental role strain items ask respondents the extent to which they are currently experiencing the following: (1) “One of your children seems very unhappy”; (2) “You feel your children don’t listen to you”; (3) “A child’s behavior is a source of serious concern to you”; (4) “One or more children do not do well enough at school or work.” Response choices include “not true” (0), “somewhat true” (1), and “very true” (2). We summed the items such that higher scores indicate greater parental role strain conflict. Reliability is .77. Individuals who do not currently have children have a “0” on the parental role strain index.

Work-to-home conflict items ask (1) “How often do things going on at work make you tense and irritable at home?” (2) “How often do the demands of your job interfere with your family life?” and (3) “When you are at home, how often do you think about things going on at work?” Response choices range from “very often” (1) to “never” (4). We reversed the codes and summed the items such that higher scores indicate more work-to-home conflict. Reliability is .68. Home-to-work conflict items ask (1) “How often do things going on at home make you tense and irritable on the job?” (2) “How often do the demands of your family interfere with your work on the job?” and (3) “When you are at work, how often do you think about things going on at home?” Choices range from “very often” (1) to “never” (4). We reversed codes and summed items such that higher scores indicate more home-to-work conflict. Reliability is .59. Separate factor analysis results confirm that the two sets of items load on distinct constructs.

Analytic Strategy

We present summary statistics for the total sample and by gender in Table 1. Next we use ordinary least squares regression analyses to examine the direct, indirect, and interaction effects. In the first equation in Table 2, we regress mattering on the ascribed status of sex, age, and education, which is usually established fairly early in the life course and changes relatively little through adulthood, and family- and home-related variables of married status, involvement in a romantic relationship, and parenthood. In equation 2, we adjust for work conditions and personal income. In equation 3, we include all variables from equations 1 and 2 and also adjust for measures of relationship role strain, parental role strain, and work/family interrole conflict. Last, we centered all continuous variables and then created interaction terms with gender by education, spouse or partner status, parenthood status, work qualities, and role conflict variables. Centering reduces problems with multicollinearity with lower-order terms (Mirowsky 1999).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows unadjusted results. Women in our sample report a higher average sense of mattering and more home-to-work conflict. However, men tend to report more weekly work hours and more income, and they are more likely to be mar-

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of all Study Variables

Variable	Total Sample	Means (Standard Deviations)	
		Women	Men
Sense of mattering	3.38 (.48)	3.43 (.45)**	3.32 (.51)
Age	36.01 (9.33)	35.80 (9.45)	36.24 (9.18)
Education	14.49 (3.06)	14.46 (2.99)	14.53 (3.14)
Married = 1	.52 (.50)	.48 (.50)*	.55 (.50)
In relationship = 1	.21 (.41)	.22 (.41)	.19 (.40)
Have children = 1	.51 (.50)	.52 (.50)	.51 (.50)
Relationship strain	1.20 (2.33)	1.22 (2.36)	1.18 (2.31)
Parental role strain	.69 (1.46)	.69 (1.55)	.69 (1.38)
Weekly work hours	40.77 (11.24)	38.14 (10.68)**	43.62 (11.16)
Income	6.63 (2.50)	5.92 (2.17)**	7.40 (2.62)
Job autonomy	12.83 (2.34)	12.70 (2.34)	12.96 (2.34)
Job routinization	4.60 (1.57)	4.57 (1.54)	4.62 (1.59)
Supervise others = 1	.43 (.50)	.40 (.49)*	.47 (.50)
Job fulfillment	3.03 (.74)	3.00 (.73)	3.06 (.76)
Home/work conflict	5.63 (1.56)	5.73 (1.67)*	5.52 (1.44)
Work/home conflict	6.12 (1.91)	6.15 (1.95)	6.09 (1.87)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

ried and supervise others at their jobs. The women in our sample may be slightly less likely to be married because we are only examining those involved in the paid labor force. It is also noteworthy that women and men in our sample report similar levels of job autonomy, routinization, and fulfillment.

Equation 1 of Table 2 indicates that women, the well educated, individuals involved in a romantic relationship, and parents tend to report a greater sense of mattering.¹ Notably, age and marital status appear unrelated to mattering. However, in equation 2 of Table 2, we adjust for occupational conditions. The size of the age coefficient increases from $-.002$ to $-.004$ and becomes statistically significant. Age is correlated positively with job autonomy, fulfillment, and income and correlated negatively with work routinization (see Appendix A). Moreover, as shown in equation 2, those occupational qualities are associated with a higher sense of mattering.² By extension, adjustment for those patterns increases the negative age effect on mattering. That is, age patterns in job conditions more favorable to mattering *suppress* age's negative association with mattering. In addition, the education coefficient is reduced from $.015$ to $.003$, or about 80 percent, and becomes statistically insignificant. Education's positive correlation with job autonomy, supervision, and income link education to mattering. Moreover, adjustment for work conditions increases the coefficient for women from $.107$ to $.136$, or about 27 percent. That suppression effect indicates that if women and men had similar work qualities and income women would report an even greater sense of mattering.

Equation 3 of Table 2 adjusts for the quality of and conflict between social roles. Relationship and parental role strains are associated negatively with mattering.

TABLE 2

The Sense of Mattering Regressed on Sex, Age, Education, Marital, Relationship, and Parenthood Statuses (1); Work Qualities (2); Role Strains (3); and Interaction Terms (4)

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Women = 1	.107*** (.030)	.136*** (.031)	.140*** (.030)	.257*** (.048)
Age	-.002 (.001)	-.004* (.001)	-.004* (.001)	-.004* (.001)
Education	.015** (.004)	.003 (.005)	.005 (.005)	-.009 (.007)
Married ^a	.068 (.041)	.027 (.041)	.074 ⁺ (.042)	.057 (.042)
In relationship ^a	.146** (.043)	.101* (.043)	.149*** (.043)	.231*** (.058)
Have children = 1	.144*** (.039)	.169*** (.039)	.212*** (.041)	.307*** (.052)
Weekly work hours		.002 (.001)	.003 (.001)	.002 (.001)
Job autonomy		.025*** (.006)	.025*** (.006)	.025*** (.006)
Job routinization		-.026* (.010)	-.022* (.010)	-.022* (.010)
Supervise others = 1		.090** (.032)	.098** (.031)	.097** (.031)
Job fulfillment		.055* (.022)	.059** (.021)	.046* (.021)
Income		.003 (.007)	-.002 (.007)	-.001 (.007)
Relationship strain			-.033*** (.006)	-.044*** (.009)
Parental role strain			-.034** (.011)	-.032** (.011)
Home/work conflict			.015 (.010)	.012 (.010)
Work/home conflict			-.010 (-.008)	.025* (.012)
Women × Education				.030** (.009)
Women × In Relationship				-.168* (.073)
Women × Have Children				-.171** (.062)
Women × Relationship Strain				.024 ⁺ (.012)
Women × Work/Home Conflict				-.059*** (.160)
Intercept	3.020	2.752	2.636	2.592
R ²	.050	.117	.153	.180

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

^a Compared to individuals who are not married and not in a relationship.

Moreover, removal of the conflictual components of those roles influences the size of their effect on mattering. Specifically, the married coefficient increases from .027 in equation 2 to .074 in equation 3, and the effect becomes marginally significant ($p < .10$). This implies that married people, in comparison to those who are not married or in a relationship, report a slightly higher sense of mattering after we statistically control for the strain associated with marriage. Similarly, the magnitude of the involvement in a romantic relationship coefficient increased from .101 to .150, or about 48.5 percent. In addition, adjustment for parental role strains increases the size of the “have children” coefficient from .169 to .212, or about 25 percent. Taken together, these patterns indicate that the strain associated with spouse or partner and parent roles conceals some of their beneficial effects on the sense of mattering. However, we failed to detect any significant main effect of either direction of work/family conflict on the sense of mattering.³

Gender-Contingent Effects

In the next set of analyses, to test for gender-contingent effects, we computed interactions terms between gender and each of the variables described above. Then we included each set of interactions in three different models to mirror equations 1, 2, and 3 in Table 2. However, in equation 4 we present only those interaction coefficients that are statistically significant in the separate analyses. Our results indicate five gender-contingent effects: (1) the positive effect of education on mattering is stronger for women in our sample, adjusting for work conditions, while education's effect among men occurs entirely indirectly via job qualities; (2) the positive effect of being involved in a relationship is stronger among men; (3) the positive effect of having children is stronger among men; (4) the negative impact of relationship role strain is stronger among men ($p = .056$); and (5) the negative association between work-family conflict and mattering is significant only among women.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigate the social-structural determinants of a central feature of the self-concept: the sense that one matters to other people. Our findings indicate that working women in our sample report a higher average level of mattering than do working men—a pattern that holds even with adjustment for statuses, roles, occupational qualities, and role conflict. Mattering items reflect the appraisal of interpersonal connectedness and affiliation. Strong social bonds are likely to be characterized by supportive exchange, which in turn cultivates an individual's conviction that he or she is of concern to other people. The gender patterns that we document parallel previous claims about women's advantage with respect to social support (Turner and Turner 1999). However, our results also indicate that gender moderates the effect of some social-structural conditions on mattering. In particular, education is associated positively with mattering among women only—a pattern that exists with and without adjustment for work conditions qualities. Our results also uncover gender differences in explanatory processes: the positive effect of education on mattering is accounted for by the fact that the well educated tend to occupy positions with greater autonomy, less routinization, more supervisory duties, and enhanced job fulfillment; however, we document those patterns among men only. Conversely, among women, the positive effect of education on mattering remains even after adjusting for favorable work-related benefits. Taken together, these results reinforce others that show education produces greater benefits for health and well-being among women (Reynolds, Mirowsky, and Ross 1999) and extend the scope of existing knowledge by accounting for gender differences in the effect of education on an important self-concept variable: mattering.

The quality of social roles, work in particular, affects mattering. For example, occupations that are characterized by greater autonomy, complexity, and supervision duties promote the sense that one matters. Those findings reinforce a tradition in sociology that chronicles the effect of work circumstances on the self-

concept. Specifically, existing research explicates occupational conditions, such as self-directedness and complexity, that positively influence the self (Kohn and Schooler 1982; Kohn and Slomczynski 1990). Moreover, each of the work qualities that we examined has independent and unique effects on mattering—for both women and men. That is, we failed to detect any significant gender-contingent effects linking those work qualities to mattering. In sum, the arrangements within and qualities of one's work role define meaningful parameters of social affiliation and integration. Employment that contains decision-making tasks, challenge and complexity, and supervisory duties may expose individuals to occasions for interpersonal achievements and rewards. By extension, these processes maintain the web of investments and commitments that convey messages about one's significance and promote feelings of mattering within the work institution.

Family ties are important components of the primary group (Cooley 1909). Interactions with family members, particularly children, provide a sense of reward and emotional fulfillment (Pearlin and Turner 1987). Our findings concur: parenthood is associated positively with mattering. However, that effect is stronger among men in our sample. To some degree, those patterns contradict the predictions of gender-role theory. Traditionally, women have stronger ties to family roles. Having children can be a source of gratification and cultivate a sense of purpose (Umberson and Williams 1999). However, the payoff for working women is surprisingly weaker, possibly because working women may experience greater time and energy demands from multiple role commitments (Gove and Geerken 1979). Overall, according to one review of the literature, "children at home decrease adult well-being" (Ross, Mirowsky, and Goldsteen 1990:1068). While mattering is not a measure of well-being, it does tap issues of relational dependency and need. Certainly, most mothers and fathers are a source of dependability for their children. However, employed women may feel the additional stress associated with child care and household management, which, in turn, may suppress the beneficial effects of having children.

Incumbency in spousal or intimate relationship roles affords a sense of purpose and meaning for all people by bolstering the sense of social connectedness and mutual obligation (Durkheim 1951). Our findings concur: married status is related positively to mattering—but that relationship emerges *only after* adjusting for the conflictual aspects of marital ties. This is an important finding because it suggests that the benefits of being married are concealed by the detriments or strains associated with the marital role. It shows that intimate relationships are complex in that they consist of "good" and "bad" parts, and only after we remove the variance associated with the stressful parts are the benefits able to surface. In addition, we document that the positive effect on mattering of being involved in a steady, romantic relationship is stronger among men in our sample. We also show that the negative impact of relationship role strain on mattering is stronger among men. In general, our results parallel previous evidence that shows men derive greater *mental health* benefits from intimate relationships (Umberson and Williams 1999). Conversely, the negative association between work-to-home spillover and mattering is significantly stronger among women—a pattern that lends support to views about traditional gender norms and role conflict as a stressor. Gender

role theory posits that women encounter different duties and responsibilities than men do in work and family roles, regardless of their participation in the labor force. Home and work compete for the time and energy of both women and men. However, women often must confront the hardships of role conflict while managing the household (Hochschild 1989, 1997). Moreover, we failed to find any evidence to support the claim that home-to-work conflict might threaten men's identity as "good provider" and erode their sense of mattering.

Limitations

Analyses of cross-sectional data do not allow us to make definitive claims about the causal order among our variables. Panel data are better suited to establish cause-and-effect relationships over time. However, we believe that gender, age, education, social roles, and work conditions reflect features that contribute to the structural "roots" of mattering. For example, it is unlikely that mattering can affect age—unless people who are totally devoid of a sense of mattering have a higher risk of mortality. That would inflate a positive association between age and mattering. Moreover, the causal flow from education to mattering (through work conditions) is more plausible than the reverse. Decades ago, Kohn and his colleagues justified that assertion in their discovery of the links between work and features of the self. In addition, the relationships among roles, role conflict, and mattering may be reciprocal. Relationships are dynamic experiences that change over time. However, a snapshot of roles and their links to mattering cannot capture the processes of harmony and withdrawal that characterize many relationships.

Future Research Directions

Shifts or losses of social roles may have an impact on one's perception of causal relevance and significance in the lives of others. Future research should investigate the extent to which role alteration affects the sense of mattering and, subsequently, how changes in mattering affect emotional health, physical well-being, and substance use and abuse. For example, the termination of a valued component of the self-concept and identity may generate emotional discord. In our analyses, we had not expected age-related suppression effects. However, those findings raise interesting questions about age-linked patterns in mattering. Life course variation in mattering may be importantly connected to the entry and exit of social roles. Late life may be a unique period in which role status affects mattering. For example, in later life the experience of retirement and widowhood imply the loss of often-valued roles. In later midlife, many people experience the "empty nest" transition. The age range in our sample restricts analyses of later-life patterns in mattering. However, future research should examine the interrelationships among age, roles, mattering, and well-being. Some existing evidence indicates that the loss of the caregiving role reduces self-esteem and mastery and increases depression (Pearlin and LeBlanc 2001). Research might also investigate the psychosocial characteristics of individuals who recover easily from the loss of mattering. In the face of role dissolution, the organization of multiple role commitments may pro-

tect individuals from the loss of mattering. Future research should also investigate the extent to which mattering plays an intervening role in the associations among gender, interpersonal relationships and roles, and mental health outcomes. Finally, more studies are needed to understand the links between social stratification and mattering. In particular, why are the positive effects of education on mattering stronger among women?

CONCLUSION

Long ago, Cooley (1909) and Mead (1934) laid the groundwork for the sociological study of the structural determinants of the self. More recently, Rosenberg (1992:593) claimed that "although the individual's view of himself may be internal, what he sees and feels when he thinks of himself is largely the product of social life." Fundamental sociological variables that designate one's location in the social structure impress on the self-concept across the life course. Our study attempts to contribute to the body of work that has focused on such matters and has since chronicled the consequences for the self-concept of social structure, statuses, and roles. Moreover, the apparent significance of gender in those processes yields insights about the interlocking psychosocial and structural features in the lives of women and men.

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NOTES

1. We also examined the number of children living at home (all ages). However, the simple dichotomous variable that we use is more strongly related to mattering. We also examined if having younger children would affect mattering more positively. However, we failed to document any significant impact of the age of children.
2. Separate analyses that exclude job autonomy, fulfillment, routinization, and supervisory responsibilities indicate that income has a significant and positive relationship with mattering. However, income is correlated with each of those variables (see Appendix A). Thus inclusion of work conditions in the same model reduces the size of the income coefficient to statistical insignificance.
3. We tested for the possibility of collinearity among the work-family conflict and role strain measures by examining their impact separately in regression analyses. However, we failed to detect any dramatic fluctuation among the coefficients and their corresponding t-values.

APPENDIX A
Correlation Matrix for all Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Mattering	—															
2. Women = 1	.109*	—														
3. Age	.018	-.024	—													
4. Education	.081*	-.011*	-.031	—												
5. Married = 1	.062*	-.070*	.299*	-.083*	—											
6. In Relationship = 1	.062	.030	-.238*	.086*	-.530*	—										
7. Have Children = 1	.121*	.002	.489*	-.131*	.544	-.290*	—									
8. Weekly Work Hours	.084*	-.245*	.008	.138*	-.042	.086*	-.114*	—								
9. Job Autonomy	.187*	-.058	.072*	.110*	.048	.048	-.015	.186*	—							
10. Job Routinization	-.169*	-.018	-.104*	-.317*	.014	-.043	.002	-.122*	-.219*	—						
11. Supervise Others = 1	.163*	-.070*	.070*	.224*	.102*	.010	.034	.223*	.238*	-.168*	—					
12. Job Fulfillment	.168*	-.039	.115*	.069*	.011	.046	.016	.211*	.259*	-.356*	.147*	—				
13. Income	.106*	-.295*	.236*	.354*	.083*	-.006	.066*	.482*	.271*	-.298*	.324*	.239*	—			
14. Relationship Strain	-.112*	.009	.044	.018	.245*	.049	.163*	-.011	.039	.065*	.052	-.028	.002	—		
15. Parental Role Strain	-.063*	.004	.279*	-.105*	.182*	-.099*	.451*	-.055	-.046	.052	.005	.016	.037	.217*	—	
16. Home-Work Conflict	.020	.069*	-.077*	-.024	.080*	-.026	.141*	-.007	-.025	.144*	-.006	-.046	-.013	.206*	.141*	—
17. Work-Home Conflict	.044	.013	-.023	.252*	.002	.034	-.055	.292*	.110*	-.098*	.195*	.196*	.234*	.063*	.001	.291*

* $p < .05$.

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